

Education in Machine Utopia

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"UTOPIA", Mr. Walter B. Pitkin informs us, "is in sight." In fact, we shall have reached it by 1975. Along with everything else in our present scheme of things, Education will have undergone a transformation. We shall no longer have to speak of our high schools as "the shame of our land", or of our liberal arts colleges as "the world's worst joke". The new Education will "be geared more accurately to the demands and ideals of real life; everybody will be trained to handle at least five or six jobs well and to use leisure advantageously and pleasantly".

Except in so far as this statement relates to six jobs rather than one, it is no more than the commonplace declaration of the objectives of Education which has been shouted from every platform for a generation, usually with the accompanying indictment that American Education has failed miserably to achieve these ends. American educators, by and large, have accepted the objectives as legitimate and have admitted the truth of the indictment. After each reiteration of their failures, they have redoubled their efforts and resolved anew to find those means of procedure and methods of organization through which they would at last be able to prepare men both to make a living and to live. But for very good reasons their success has become more and more meagre.

What is this "real life", for which Education must provide? Today it is a machine civilization, and

neither Mr. Pitkin nor anyone else who admires it and who calls upon Education to save it, proposes for it to be anything different in the future. Indeed the machine is to usher in the Utopia.

If we are looking for real life, we might be able to observe that the machine method of production has rendered the business of making a living utterly distasteful, and that our distaste for it is responsible for our attempt to reduce the world's work to the status of a mere means existing for the furtherance of some end held to be desirable. This attempt destroys the unity of life. The five o'clock whistle divides human existence into two segments. On the one side lies work, dull and boring, to be endured as few hours as possible, an almost intolerable desert barren of anything that could satisfy the spirit of man: on the other side lie the Elysian fields of leisure, the gardens of the abundant life. As Science and Progress move forward our daily sojourn in the Sahara of toil becomes ever shorter—blessed relief, for the sands are blistering—but the gardens beyond become more spacious and their leafy lanes more enchanting. In these gardens we earnestly seek—only seek—the good life, and we imagine that nothing better could befall mankind than a progressive enlargement of the number of hours available for the search. All the while the breach widens between work and leisure, between the hours assigned to production and those assigned to enjoyment.

But life refuses to be departmentalized in any such fashion as this. Ends insist upon being consistent with their means. The life that exists beyond the bounds of the world's serious work must be of a piece with

that which characterizes men as they go about making their daily bread. If the economic system crushes out the personality of man, if it gives his imagination no play and offers no outlet for his creative impulses, there can be no leisure afterward to restore his wounded spirit. What leisure men so mistreated can have is not leisure but idleness, a state of surfeited and aimless boredom. Art, music, literature, religious expression cannot rise above the level of the serious business of life. They find their roots there and they must express that or nothing.

It is true that a certain spurious culture may be attached to a social régime by borrowing from other peoples whose lives have been unified around principles capable of sustaining a high order of human expression, but the veneer is very thin and promptly blisters and cracks in contact with its incongruous host. Our Education has spent much of its time in fostering this spurious growth. Hence its failure. The machine age seeks to escape from the dullness of its world into the leisurely enjoyments of a riper and fuller life. But there is no escape. The unity of life will not be denied. If Education undertakes to become the ladder of escape, it sets for itself an impossible task. For Education is the cult of the ordered unity of life. It neither can nor should participate—as it has attempted to do—in any dismemberment of life's organic whole. Its task is to enable the human personality to come to terms with life, and life makes no piecemeal contracts with those who seek to know and grasp her.

If machine civilization is barren and ignoble during the hours when it exacts human servitude, it must

inevitably be so in the hours that remain. There is no escape for the frustrated soul, for there is nothing to escape to. This is a conclusion from which we shrink, a conclusion that is unacceptable though necessary. For this reason we promise ourselves a soul-satisfying leisure, and, having no other power upon which to call, we call upon Education to lead us into this new Canaan. Education, because it too cannot endure the truth, accepts the challenge.

But the necessity of integrating the whole of life is inexorable. Our deep-seated conviction that a bearable life cannot be integrated around the machine method as a nucleus, instead of sending Education off on a vain search for a way of escape from the necessity, should have set it to hunting some principle about which an acceptable integration of life could be achieved. If this principle turns out to be inconsistent with some of our present arrangements for adding to the world's store of goods, Education need not be dismayed. It has no right to the name unless it follows its true pole-star—the oneness of life.